

Hello. This is Tom Cookman with a Community Comment.

Last Saturday, February 21st, marked the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the USS Bismarck Sea by two Kamikaze pilots. There were 923 men on board, of which 318 lost their lives. One of the 605 survivors was a dear friend of mine, Herb Wall, who shared his story many times with anyone who asked. He was a young man of just twenty years old and was on duty at the time the first plane struck the carrier. Herb said when the plane hit, his world became silent as he watched a fellow serviceman who had been running across the deck get launched into the air by the impact of the plane. Herb's world remained silent and everything in slow motion as he watched the sailor rise high into the air and fall back to the ship. The exact moment the sailor landed on the deck is when the horrific sounds of screaming men and intense explosions returned to Herb's ears. The aircraft carrier survived the first plane's attack, but when a second Kamikaze plane hit the ship, their fire fighting salt water supply system was destroyed and any ability to keep up with damage control was lost. The order to abandon ship was given soon after. The only feasible option was to jump overboard. Herb ran to the edge of the ship and looked down on the many men already in the water. Some jumped into the frigid water landing on and injuring fellow survivors. Putting others safety before his, Herb chose to dangerously climb down the side of the sinking ship instead of jumping. As Herb descended, planes, equipment and other debris were sliding off the deck, over his head and into the water. This story will never again be told by Herb, because Herb Wall passed away last Saturday on the very anniversary of the sinking of the USS Bismarck Sea. Herb Wall was one of the local servicemen who would attend our Veteran's Day Celebrations. Amazingly he could still fit into the uniform he wore as a

lean young man, and he wore it proudly. You have probably seen his smiling face featured on the front page of our newspaper many times. After Herb returned home from the war, he married his one and only wife, Agnes. They had two sons and lived out in the country on Greenwood Heights, which was alright for Herb, because he was an avid outdoorsman. He loved to hunt and took me on many hunts with him into the Trinity Alps and to Montana. Herb was a faithful Christian man, and he would lead us in Bible study in the early morning hours before we hunted. He was a great example of strong faith, as he lost his only children, the two sons he cherished, to a rogue wave off the jetty when they were young men. Although Herb felt the pain of their loss his entire life, he still remained a steadfast servant to God and others. Never wavering, and always willing to serve, he was a frequent visitor to convalescent hospitals, where he would joyfully lead the residents in gospel songs. What Herb lacked in talent, he made up for in enthusiasm. Herb was friendly, kind-hearted, and never met a stranger. It didn't matter if they looked shady or scary. He would walk right up to them, with his hand outstretched in a pledge of friendship and trust. He was a dear friend to my family, and a father figure to me my entire life. Even though I know that he is joyfully reunited with his sons in heaven, I'm sure going to miss him.

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